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ORIGIN OF THE MEOS : AN ASSESSMENT

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Mewat is a hilly region surrounded by the Arawali Ranges. Its inhabitants are known as Mewati while its Muslim population is called 'Meos'. Other communities are Jat, Gujar, Ahir, Meena, Rajput, Brahman, Mahajan, Harijan etc.¹ The geographical boundaries of Mewat have been changing from time to time. In the period of Shahabuddin Mohammad Ghorī the area of Mewat was from Delhi to Alwar and from Ajmer to Agra. During the Lodhi period the area comprised of the southern part of Delhi, Rewari, Narnaul, Tijara, Alwar, Bayana, Bharatpur and some parts of Agra with its capital at Kotla.²

A Meo poet has rightly described the area of Mewat as follows :

"Et Dilli ut Agra, Et Alwar Bairath

Kalo Pahar Suhawano, Jake Beech Baso Mewat"

But in modern times the Mewat comprises of southern part of Delhi, some areas of Gurgaon, Ballabhgarh, Alwar, Bharatpur and Mathura.³

The traditions and cultures of the Meos are similar to those of the Rajputs and they feel proud of calling themselves as the *Suryavanshi* and *Chandravanshi* Rajputs and Kashatriyas. But their origin bears many controversies as many historians and Meo scholars gave many theories regarding their origin. Arab historians believe that the Jats and the Meos are the descendants of Ham, the son of Nooh.⁴ But the Meo scholars are of the opinion that the Meos were the descendants of Madia, the third son of Yapeth and the grandson of Nooh. According to them, the Aryans are the descendants of Yapeth, which proves that the Meos belong to the same branch as the Aryans.⁵ It is generally believed by the Meo scholars that like the Aryans, the Meos also came from central or

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Abul Shakoor, *Tarikh-e-Meo Kashatriya*, Delhi, 1974, pp. 112-17.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 113-14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴ Elliot & Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. 1, Allahabad, 1969, p. 519.

⁵ Rao Amrit Khan, *Tarikh-e-Meo*, Lahore (ND), p. 69; see also Siddique Ahmed, *Mewat Ek Khoj*, Delhi, 1997, p. 44.

west Asia and latter on settled down in Punjab and Sindh regions of Indian subcontinent. As the time passed they migrated to Rajasthan and then to the present area of Mewat.⁶

In order to prove that they are of ancient origin, many Meo scholars like Abul Shakoor, Maulana Zakaullah, Choudhary Mohammed Afzal Khan, Choudhary Ali Mohammed Khan etc. assert that Meos are amongst the oldest communities of India. Choudhary, Abdul Shakoor has given a long list of the words which are phonetically similar to Meo. This, according to him, had a definite historical and linguistic link with the Meo. These words are as follows :

Mer, Meral, Mor, Mori, May, Mao, Moria, Mari, Maro, Maria, Mewara, Meora, Meoras, Med, Medi, Meoran, Mewal, Malwi, Mawali, Meotala, Mehar, Meral, Marwar, Maruwar, Mewar, Merwara, Mewat, Mewas, Meras, Meriwat, Marusthal, Marusthan, Mardes, Marudes, Madhu, Madit, Medpat, Kedat, Marat etc.⁷ He also advocates that it was the Meos spread in North-West of India which gave name to the regions and principalities such as Marwar, Meruwar, Mewar, Morwara, Mewat, Marusthal etc.⁸

The Meo scholars also claim, that the Meos are the one of the sections of the early Aryans who migrated to India and they were Kshatriyas by caste because their dynastic lineages, traditions, customs and life style are similar to those of Kshatriyas.⁹ In the beginning Kshatriyas were divided into two dynasties – *Suryavanshi* and *Chandravanshi*. Later on four Agnikula dynasties— Parmar, Solanki, Chauhan and Chalukya emerged. But as the time passed their dynastic progeny multiplied, further they were divided into *gotra*¹⁰ and *pal*.¹¹

Like the Kshatriyas and Rajputs, the Meos are also divided into different dynasties, *gotras* and *pals* from ancient times. But in the time of Balban, a

6. Mohammed Habibur Rehman Khan Mewati, *Tazkira Sufia-e-Mewat*. p. 39.

7. Abul Shakoor, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-05.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 238-39.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 245. *Gotra* is a Sanskrit word meaning common house. It is said that initially when the people started settling themselves, they constructed a large common house to protect themselves from enemies and wild animals. This common house was known as *Gotra* and inhabitants of the house were considered as people of the same *Gotra*.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 250. In Hindi *Pal* means a group or party, but in Mewat *Pal* is considered to be a group of *Gotra*. Many *Gotras* combine to make a *Pal*.

Tomar Balot Meo Kaku Rana reorganised *gotra* and *pal* system and divided the Meos into 13 *pals* and 52 *gotras*.¹² Abul Shakoor gave the name of the *pals* and related dynasties as follows¹³ :

<u>Dynasty</u>	<u>Pal</u>
Yadu	Chhirklot, Dimrot, Dulot, Pundlot, Nayai
Tomar	Balot, Ladawat, Dirwal, Ratawat
Chauhan	Pahat
Rathor	Kalisa
Kushwaha	Dahingal
Badgoojar	Singal

Abul Shakoor while proving that the Meos are Kshatriyas and of the Aryan origin stated that Meos settlement was and still has been around the Arawali Ranges. The Arawali was so named because of the settlement of the Aryans. He also proves that the old name of this range was Aryabal which later on changed to Arbali and further to Arawali.¹⁴

An eminent scholar of Rajasthan history, James Tod has stated about Mer¹⁵ tribe. They inhabited a region known as Merwara, a hilly region of Arawali ranges. This region was also called Merot and Merawat.¹⁶ But Tod has never stated the word Meo or Mewat whereas Meo community was in abundance in Rajasthan at that time. Perhaps they were the Meos whom Tod has called the Mer. Abul Shakoor has also confirmed that in the early times the Meos were also called *Med* and *Mer*.¹⁷ Tod again says that *Mer* was a branch of the Mina or Maina, one of the aborigines of India.¹⁸ A Meo scholar Siddique Ahmed accepted the link of the Minas with the Meos but refuted that the Mer or Meos are a branch of the Minas and says that Mina were the off-shoots of Meos. He proves this fact by saying that the Minas were the descendants of the Greek Minu (a Meo tribe which later on separated themselves from that very tribe by giving up old region, customs and traditions of the Meos).¹⁹ He confirms their

12. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

15. *Meru* or *Mer* is a Sanskrit word meaning a fabulous mountain. Merawat or Merot means belonging to the mountain. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Delhi, 1971, Vol. I, p. 789.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Abul Shakoor, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

18. Tod, Vol. II, p. 789.

19. Siddique Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

relationship by stating that both Minas and Meos have many common *pals* like Singal, Dehengal, Dulot, Pundlot, Demrot, Nayai etc.²⁰

James Tod has also described another tribe, *Med*. He has stated that the Meds were the descendants of Yayati, third son of Nahush and Madai was the founder of the Meds. They spreaded in northern part of India, in Punjab and across the Indus.²¹ They also might be the Meos because of a Meo scholar, Rao Amrit Khan stated that this area was inhabited by the Meos. He writes that in India the Meos had their rule one time or another in Sindh, Taxila, almost all parts of Rajasthan, Mathura and many areas of Uttar Pradesh.²² Another historian Rashiduddin declares that both Meos and Jats lived in Sindh in the time of Mahabharata War. Elliot & Dowson also confirm that the Jats and the Meos²³ occupied the banks of the Indus in the province of Sindh. They invaded each others territory and later on they sent a deputation to Duryodhana, king of Hastinapur, begging to nominate a king to rule over them. Duryodhana accordingly nominated his sister Dassal (Dushala) the wife of Jayadratha.²⁴ Later on in that very region the Meos fought with many invaders like Iranians, Greeks, Muslims etc.²⁵

At the time of Iranian conquest of North-Western India the Meos and Jats joined their army and spread to Iran and other parts of Iranian Empire. When the Muslims invaded and occupied Iran, they also embraced Islam and helped the Arabs in Islamic conquest.²⁶ The Arab history states that in the Arabian countries many Indians resided with the name of Zatt (Jat), Med (Meo), Takakra (Thakur) etc.²⁷

Like the Iranians the Greeks and many other invaders invaded India and it resulted in the spread of the Meos to the native places of the conquerers. Rao Amrit Khan also states that the Meos has spreaded all over the world and established their sway at a number of places.²⁸ Mohammed Habibur Rahman

20. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

21. Tod, Vol. I, p. 50.

22. Rao Amrit Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

23. Elliot & Dowson, Vol. I, pp. 519-20. Arab historians and many other scholars called 24 Meos and Meds. It is being proved from many researches that before embracing Islam the Meos were known as Meds.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Mohammed Habibur Rehman Khan Mewati, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Rao Amrit Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-160.

Khan Mewati confirms that when the Arabs at first came to Sindh, they found two brave communities which gave very tough resistance to them. They were Meds (Meos) and Jats. Around the 2nd century A.D. a group of the Meds of Sindh entered Rajputana and settled in an area which came to be known with their name as 'Med-pat'. Later on its name was changed as 'Mewar'.²⁹ Subsequently they spreaded into the areas of Ajmer, Jaipur, Alwar, Bharatpur, Bairath, Mathura, Bayana, Ruhelkhand etc.³⁰ In Rajasthan they embraced Islam and in order to differentiate themselves from their parent community they called themselves as 'Meos' instead of 'Meds'.³¹

A large scale conversion started from the time of Mahmud of Ghazni. When he invaded India his nephew Syed Salar Masud Ghazi started Islamic Missionary work in Rajasthan and sent a deputation to Mewat under Syed Ibrahim. He defeated the Tomar Raja Tejpal of Tijara. Tejpal embraced Islam and took the name Jalal Khan. Later on many Tomars and other tribes and clans adopted Islam at the hands of Khawaja Muinuddin Chishti, Mian Syed Hussain Khan Sawar and Badiuddin urf Shah Madar.³²

All the above mentioned opinions and statements of the Meo scholars are more traditional and hypothetical than historical. They try to prove that Meo community and their way of life has much more glorious background than any other community in the world. They have tried to connect each and every word starting with Mer, Med, Meen, Mar, Maru etc. with the word Meo. They are also of the opinion that all the above words have historical link with the word Meo. Their opinions are based more on conjunctures than on scientific examination.

No doubt, in the modern period the Meos are found in many parts of the world but their settlements in these areas are not of that antiquity as the Meo scholars prove to be. In India also the Meos have spread all over the country in search of livelihood and employment and they have stuck to their Meo identity in those settlements as well. These migrations can never be the logical proof of their glorious past. As far as Rajasthan is concerned, it is a desert and hilly region. In Sanskrit language the hills and mountains are called as Meru or Mer. So the word Mer has been added to most of the places, regions and kingdoms of Rajasthan, i.e. Ajmer, Jaisalmer, Badmer, Mewar, Marwar etc. The Meo scholars are of the opinion that these names exist due to Meo settlements. But it does not

29. Mohammed Habibur Rehman Khan Mewati, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-56.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

32. Abul Shakoor, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-70. See also Rao Amrit Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 161; and Siddique Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

at all appear to be logical and historical. The word 'Marusthal' also means a desert region and not the region of the Meos as asserted by Meo scholars.

The theory that the Meos were earlier known as Mods comes to be historical to a great extent. They might also be the offshoots of the same early Aryan Tribe. It is also probable that Mors and Meenas are the offshoots of the Mod tribe but history does not prove it.

The Meds had spreaded to Rajashtan and some of their leaders had also ruled over this area but most of them latter on adopted the agriculture occupation. The community in order to organise itself divided the brotherhood into *gotras* and *pals*. At the advent of Islam in India major part of the community embraced it and in order to distinguish themselves from the rest of the community, called themselves as Meos. In the modern period also in the Mewat region only Muslims are known as Meos. Their co-inhabitants are simply known as Mewati according to the name of the region Mewat.